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ABSTRACT

This document is a chapter in "The Principles and Practice of Educational Management," which aims to provide a systematic and analytical introduction to the study of educational management. The structure of the book reflects the main substantive areas of educational leadership and management, and most of the major themes are covered in the volume's 19 chapters, of which this is one. This chapter explains the concept of self-management, noting that it has been distinguished in the past from the concept of autonomy. The merits of school-based management, local management, and self-management have been robust over the past 2 decades. It is now apparent that these management features are a part of school reform in virtually every nation that is seeking to improve the quality of learning. This overview provides a brief account of developments in a number of countries, including developing countries, with acknowledgment that several nations are now moving, or proposing to move, beyond self-management toward autonomy. Evidence of the impact of this shift is reviewed, as well as findings from particular nations. Included with these findings are results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study in 39 nations that identified a number of policy settings for optimizing outcomes on a range of organizational characteristics. These settings included a high level of self-management within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, assessment, and accountabilities. The review concludes that the merits of self-management have been established, but the focus of implementation must shift to making the connections between empowerment at the school level and strategies to achieve improved learning outcomes for students. (Contains 34 references.) (RJM)

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Brian J. Caldwell

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Autonomy and Self-Management: Concepts and Evidence

Brian J. Caldwell

Introduction

Debates on the merits of school-based management, local management and self-management have been robust and inconclusive for most of the last two decades since these elements of school reform made their appearance in a small number of nations. It is now apparent that these phenomena are a feature of school reform in virtually every nation that is seeking to improve the quality of learning. In most instances, adoption appears irreversible, with most stakeholders not wishing to return to more centralised approaches. There has been a pause in some instances, and a few steps back have been taken in others, but the trend is inexorable. Critics have referred to the absence of evidence of impact on learning. There is a range of implementation issues, not least of which is the fact that implementation has occurred at the same time as the costs of providing a quality education have increased, leading to a more demanding regime of accountability, for learning outcomes and for the use of public funds.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the concept of self-management, noting that it has been distinguished in the past from the concept of autonomy. A brief account is provided of developments in a number of countries, including developing countries, with acknowledgement that several are now moving or proposing to move beyond self-management towards autonomy. Evidence of impact is reviewed, with findings from particular nations as well as from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 39 nations that identified a number of 'policy settings' for optimising outcomes on a range of organisational characteristics. These settings included a high level of self-management within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, assessment and accountabilities.

The chapter concludes with the view that the merits of self-management have been established, but the focus of implementation must shift to making the connections between empowerment at the school level and strategies to achieve improved learning outcomes for students.

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The concepts

This writer is co-author of three books on the self-managing school (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; 1992; 1998). Conceptualization was consistent and along the following lines. A self-managing school is a school in a system of education to which there has been decentralized a significant amount of authority and responsibility to make decisions related to the allocation of resources within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities. Resources are defined broadly to include knowledge, technology, power, material, people, time, assessment, information and finance.

A self-managing school is not an autonomous school nor is it a self-governing school, for each of these kinds of schools involves a degree of independence that is not provided in a centrally determined framework. The existence of a centrally determined framework implies that a self-managing school is part of a system of schools, so the concept applies most readily to systems of government or public schools, or to systems of non-government or private schools where there has been decentralisation, such as in systems of Catholic schools in some countries. Truly independent, non-systemic schools would ordinarily be considered self-governing or autonomous schools.

The concept of autonomous schools has moved to centre stage with the release of a White Paper that contains the plans of the Blair government for its second term (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). Self-management, or local management, was one of several thrusts in the 1988 Education Reform Act of the Thatcher government, extending to all schools in Britain a practice that had been successfully pioneered in several authorities as local financial management. The Blair government went further by requiring local education authorities to decentralise a larger part of their education budgets to the school level (now approaching 90 per cent across all authorities). The Blair government had previously abandoned the contentious reform of the Thatcher government that created a number of grant-maintained schools, moving beyond self-management to self-government. These schools had a degree of autonomy and higher levels of funding that could be secured on the majority vote of parents in favour of a change in status.

Announcing the intentions of the Blair government, paragraph 5.5 in the White Paper (Summary Document) declares that 'the best schools will earn greater autonomy'. The following excerpts illustrate how the process will work:

> We propose to free the best secondary schools from constraints which stand in the way of yet higher standards. We will legislate to allow them to opt out of parts of the National Curriculum, for example to lead the development of thinking about Key Stage 4. And we will allow them flexibility over some elements of teachers' pay and conditions, for example to allow schools to agree to a more flexible working day and year. Important elements of pay and conditions will remain common to all teachers. (Ibid.: para. 5.5)

> But schools also need freedom to rethink the teacher's role. Qualified teachers need to be allowed to concentrate on using their professional skills to raise standards, delegating other tasks to support staff where this is practicable. We will therefore legislate to give schools more freedom to innovate – sharing good teachers, for example. (ibid.: para. 7.7)
>
> Central to achieving higher standards is the confident, well-managed school, setting its own targets and accountable for its performance. Within the framework of accountability we have established, we want schools to have as much freedom as possible. (Ibid.: para. 8.1)
>
> We want to reduce and simplify regulations that schools find burdensome. For example, we will make it easier for governors to provide childcare and loosen legislative constraints so that schools can more easily share resources and expertise, for example sharing an excellent team of subject teachers. (Ibid.: para. 8.2)

Prime Minister Tony Blair summarised the intentions in these terms: 'Deregulation will give all successful schools greater freedom and less central control. New freedoms over governance, the provision of community facilities, and engagement with external partners, will enable them to meet the needs of pupils and parents more effectively' (Blair, 2001: 44).

It is evident that the Blair government is not creating autonomous schools. The outcome will be a higher degree of autonomy within a system of self-managing schools. A centrally determined framework remains but there is a degree of deregulation for schools deemed to be successful. There is an expectation that greater autonomy will improve outcomes for students.

Tracks for change

Caldwell and Spinks (1998) reviewed the major directions of education reform in a number of countries and identified three tracks for change. Track 1 was the building of systems of self-managing schools. Track 2 was an unrelenting focus on learning outcomes. Track 3 was the creation of schools for the knowledge society. The concept of 'tracks' was employed rather than 'stages' because schools, systems and nations were moving on all three at the same time, but differed in respect to the distance they had moved.

Developments in Britain in the second term of the Blair government constitute further movement down Track 1 ('building systems of self-managing schools') with a commitment to continue down Track 2 ('an unrelenting focus on learning outcomes'). Recognition of the importance of education to the well being of the nation and the energising role of information and communications technology characterised movement on Track 3 ('creating schools for the knowledge society').

There are similar developments in Victoria, Australia, selected for particular mention because its system of self-managing schools has evolved over 25 years to the point where it is now the largest system of public education, with more than 1,600 schools, to have decentralised as much as 94 per cent of the state's school education budget to the school level. It is especially noteworthy because the major thrust that occurred under the Kennett government from 1992 to 1999 (often compared with that of the Thatcher government) was continued by the Bracks Labor government. An interesting parallel is that a small number of self-governing schools were created in the final year of the Kennett government, and the Bracks government, in similar style and for much the same reasons that the Blair government abolished grant-maintained schools, immediately abandoned them. The Bracks government lived up to its commitment to enhance self-management for all schools by increasing the proportion of state funds that were decentralized to the school level (Connors, 2000).

Much attention has been paid over the last decade to trends in self-management in Australia, Britain, some systems in Canada, New Zealand, and some districts in the United States. There is growing momentum in many other nations, indeed, one is hard pressed to find any nation engaged in education reform that has not implemented some measure of self-management. There have been significant developments in nations as diverse as Israel, where the concept of autonomous schools has been employed (see Gibton et al., 2000; Volansky, 2001); Japan (Yoshida, 2001); and Thailand (National Education Act of B.E. 2542, 1999).

Three generations of studies on the impact of self-management

After several decades of reform, it is fair to ask about the extent to which there has been an impact on outcomes for students. It is sobering to note the consistent finding in early research that there appeared to be few if any direct links between local management, self-management or school-based management and learning outcomes (Malen et al., 1990; Summers and Johnson, 1996). Some researchers have noted that such gains are unlikely to be achieved in the absence of purposeful links between capacities associated with school reform, in this instance, self-management, and what occurs in the classroom, in learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching (see Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Cheng, 1996; Hanushek, 1997; Levačić, 1995; OECD, 1994; Smith et al., 1996).

Research of the kind cited above can now be seen as constituting the first generation of studies of self-management, and that second and third generations of studies are now discernible. It is in the third generation that the nature of the linkage between self-management and learning outcomes can be mapped in a manner that can be trustworthy in policy and practice.

The inconclusive nature of the linkage in first- and second-generation studies

Summers and Johnson (1996) provided a meta-analysis of the first generation of research. They located 70 studies that purported to be evaluations of school-based management, but only 20 of these employed a systematic approach and just seven included a measure of student outcomes. They concluded that 'there is little evidence to support the notion that school-based management is effective in increasing student performance. There are very few quantitative studies, the studies are not statistically rigorous, and the evidence of positive results is either weak or non-existent' (ibid.: 80). Apart from the 'overwhelming obstacles' in the way of assessing impact, Summers and Johnson drew attention to the fact that few initiatives 'identify student achievement as a major objective. The focus is on organisational processes, with virtually no attention to how process changes may affect student performance' (ibid.: 1996: 92–3).

In a report on the effects of school resources on student achievement, Hanushek (1997: 156) drew attention to the finding 'that simply decentralising decision-making is unlikely to work effectively unless there exist clear objectives and unless there is direct accountability'. It is the absence of this framework that characterises the context for what are described here as first-generation studies.

The second generation of studies accompanied the more far-reaching reforms in self-management, with most of the available budget in a school system decentralised to the local level within a comprehensive and centrally determined curriculum, standards and accountability framework. In general, the findings were as inconclusive as those from the first generation.

In Britain, for example, there was no research that mapped a cause-and-effect relationship between local management and discretionary use of resources, on the one hand, and improved learning outcomes for students on the other, building on the findings of studies that yielded strong opinion-based evidence that gains had been made (for example, Bullock and Thomas, 1994). Drawing predominantly on evidence from Britain, but referring also to outcomes elsewhere, Bullock and Thomas concluded that:

> It may be that the most convincing evidence of the impact of local management is on the opportunities which it has provided for managing the environment and resources for learning, both factors that can act to support the quality of learning in schools. What remains elusive, however, is clear-cut evidence of these leading through to direct benefits on learning, an essential component if we are to conclude that it is contributing to higher levels of efficiency. (Bullock and Thomas, 1997: 217)

Bullock and Thomas then went to the heart of the issue:

> If learning is at the heart of education, it must be central to our final discussion of decentralisation. It means asking whether, in their variety of guises, the changes characterised by decentralisation have washed over and around children in classrooms, leaving their day-to-day experiences largely untouched. In asking this question, we must begin by recognising that structural changes in governance, management and finance may leave largely untouched the daily interaction of pupils and teachers. (Ibid.: 219)

Illuminating the links in third-generation studies

A third generation of studies emerged in the late 1990s. The policy context was the same as for the second generation, namely, for local management in Britain and self-management in Victoria, with the emergence of more comprehensive and coherent systemic reform in the United States, as in Chicago. There are, however, three important differences to mark this generation of study. First, by the late 1990s, a substantial set of data on student achievement had been established as a result of system-wide tests that enabled change at the local level to be tracked over several years. Schools were also able to draw on an increasingly deep pool of other indicators. Second, the policy framework had become more explicit with respect to expectations for schools to make the link between elements in the school reform programme and learning outcomes for students. This reflected change on Track 2 ('an unrelenting focus on learning outcomes') in the classification of Caldwell and Spinks (1998). Third, researchers were utilising an increasingly sophisticated array of techniques for analysis of data, including structural equation modeling, along with more focused approaches to case study.

Macro-analysis of TIMSS data on student achievement The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) was the largest international comparative study of student achievement ever undertaken. Information was gathered on a range of factors as part of the project, including student and family characteristics, resources and teacher characteristics, and institutional settings including the extent of centralisation in examinations, distribution of responsibilities between centre and schools, teachers' and parents' influence in decision-making, extent of competition with independent private schools and incentives for students. Analysis of the performance of more than 260,000 students from 39 countries was undertaken at Kiel University in Germany and reported by Woessmann (2001). Regression analysis yielded interesting findings that are certain to create much discussion and debate.

> They show that institutions strongly matter for cross-country differences in students' educational performance, while increased resource inputs do not

> contribute to increased performance. Controlling for indicators of parents' education levels and resource inputs, three indicators of institutional features of the education system have strong and statistically significant effects on country-level student performance. Increased school autonomy in supply choice and increased scrutiny of performance assessment lead to superior performance levels, and a larger influence of teacher unions in the education process leads to inferior performance levels. Together, the variables explain three quarters of the cross-country variation in mathematics test scores and 60 per cent of the variation in science test scores, whereas previous studies which focused on family and resource effects explained only up to one quarter of the cross-country variation in student performance tests. (Woessmann, 2001: 6)

Woessmann (2001: 79) concludes 'the only policy that promises positive effects is to create an institutional system where all the people involved have an incentive to improve student performance'. He suggests that nine features are favourable to student performance:

- central examinations
- centralised control mechanisms in curricular and budgetary affairs
- school autonomy in process and personnel decisions
- an intermediate level of administration performing administrative tasks and educational funding
- competition from private educational institutions
- individual teachers having both incentives and powers to select appropriate teaching methods
- limited influence of teacher unions
- scrutiny of students' educational performance
- encouragement of parents to take an interest in teaching matters.

There are some important observations to make about the list. First, 'centralised control mechanisms in curricular and budgetary affairs' refers to centrally determined frameworks not to the manner of implementation at the school level. In the case of budget, this refers to the existence of a funding mechanism that specifies how funds shall be allocated to schools; schools then determine how these funds are deployed at the local level. Second, Woessmann is cautious about the findings on the influence of teacher unions. It is important to record his caution because the matter is contentious (see Steelman et al., 2000, for findings that suggest unions have a positive impact on educational performance). He notes that the indicator of influence in the study might serve as a 'proxy for the effect of a standard salary scale as opposed to merit differentials in teacher pay' (Woessmann, 2001: 81).

This international study provides evidence on an international comparative scale of the efficacy of approaches such as school-based management, local management or self-management that are set in a centrally determined framework.

Comprehensive reform in Chicago An increasing number of school districts in the United States are establishing local management on the scale now evident in England and Wales, but these are still a small minority among the 15,000 jurisdictions in that nation. The public school district in Chicago is one such system with a comprehensive and relatively coherent set of reforms dating from 1988. The stated goal of the Chicago School Reform Act was to raise the level of student achievement to match national norms. According to Hess (1999: 67) the chief mechanism to achieve this goal is a system of school-based decision-making, with school councils and local responsibility for school improvement planning, budget allocation and selection of staff within a framework of system-wide standards and tests.

The most powerful evidence of linkage between self-management and learning outcomes in Chicago, arguably in any jurisdiction, has emerged in the longitudinal studies of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (Bryk, 1998; Bryk et al., 1998). Value-added measures of student achievement over a number of years were included in the design of an innovative productivity index. A model of direct and indirect effects, including a capacity for self-management, was derived. The observations of Hess (1999) on experience in Chicago is striking:

> budget analyses . . . and interview comments from [headteachers] show that discretionary funds were important to schools in their efforts to change. [Headteachers] said over and over that these funds were the engine that allowed them to make changes in their schools. We found, however, that their efforts were compromised to the extent that they were forced to siphon off resources to maintain programs cut by the board of education to balance the budget each year. Further, we have seen that some schools spent a lot of new discretionary money without much to show for those expenditures in terms of effective use of funds to foster improved student learning. More money was crucial to improvement in the schools where improvement was taking place. But more money did not automatically translate into better student outcomes. How the money was used does appear to matter. (Hess, 1999: 81)

Research in Victoria helps explain how money may be used in efforts to achieve improvements in learning outcomes for students.

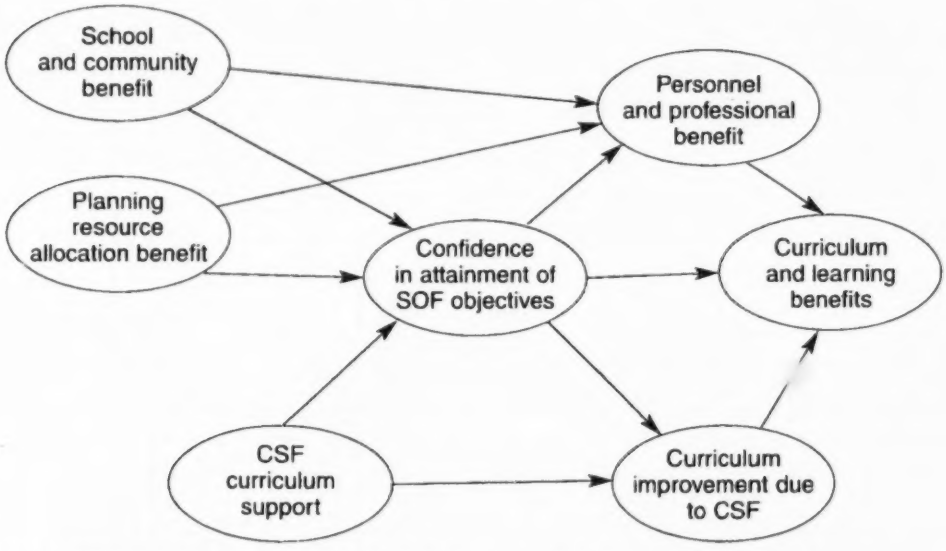
Self-managing schools in Victoria The objectives and purposes of the reforms in Victoria in the 1990s in the Schools of the Future (SOF) programme range over educational ('to enhance student learning outcomes', 'actively foster the attributes of good schools'); professional ('recognise teachers as true professionals', 'allow [headteachers] to be true leaders'); community ('to determine the destiny of the school, its character and ethos') and accountability ('for the progress of the school and the achievement of its students').

Successive surveys in the Cooperative Research Project (1994; 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1997; 1998) consistently found that headteachers believed

there had been moderate to high level of realisation of the expected benefit in respect to improved learning outcomes for students. In the final survey in 1997, 84 per cent gave a rating of 3 or more on the 5-point scale (1 is 'low' and 5 is 'high').

Figure 3.1 contains a model showing the effects of six sets of benefits on curriculum and learning benefits, which are the object of interest in this section of the chapter, based on ratings in the final survey in 1997. (All effects are statistically significant. The analysis involved structural equation modeling using LISREL 8 [Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993]. See Cooperative Research Project [1998] or Caldwell and Spinks [1998] for detailed explanations.)

The model shows that three factors have a direct effect on curriculum and learning benefits, which includes improved learning outcomes for students. These are personnel and professional benefits (which reflects ratings for realisation of the expected benefits of better personnel management, enhanced professional development, shared decision-making, improved staff performance, more effective organisation following restructure, increased staff satisfaction and an enhanced capacity to attract staff); curriculum improvement due to CSF (which reflects ratings for improvement of capacity for planning the curriculum, establishing levels and standards for students, moving to a curriculum based on learning outcomes and meeting the needs of students); and confidence in attainment of SOF objectives.


School and community benefit
Personnel and professional benefit
Planning resource allocation benefit
Confidence in attainment of SOF objectives
Curriculum and learning benefits
CSF curriculum support
Curriculum improvement due to CSF

Note: SOF = Schools of the Future (the reform initiative that included a higher level of self-management)
CSF = Curriculum and Standards Framework

Figure 3.1 Model of effects of six sets of benefits of self-management on perceptions of curriculum and learning benefits

Source: Cooperative Research Project (1998)

Noteworthy are the pathways of indirect effects, illustrated for planning and resource allocation benefits, which is mediated in respect to its effect on curriculum and learning benefits through personnel and professional benefits and confidence in attainment of SOF objectives. Expressed another way, realising the expected benefits of better resource management, clearer sense of direction, increased accountability and responsibility, greater financial and administrative flexibility, and improved long-term planning, will have no direct effect on curriculum and learning benefits but will have an indirect effect to the extent they impact on personnel and professional benefits which in turn have a direct effect on curriculum and learning benefits.

Also noteworthy are factors that have a direct impact on confidence in attainment of SOF objectives. High ratings of confidence were associated with high ratings for the achievement of planning and resource allocation benefits, school and community benefits and CSF curriculum support. The likely explanation is that unless headteachers experience benefits in these last three domains, they are unlikely to have confidence in the reform.

The findings in these surveys are limited to the extent that they are based on the perceptions of headteachers rather than measures of student achievement. This has been a concern in most efforts to determine the impact of reform in recent years. In the case of the Cooperative Research Project, there was no system-wide baseline data on student achievement when the reform was implemented.

Two sets of case studies in Victoria (Hillier, 1999; Wee, 1999) help illuminate the links illustrated in Figure 3.1 under conditions where headteachers report improved learning outcomes. Are the linkages evident in the model confirmed in deep on-site investigations in particular schools where improvement is claimed? The research design in both studies thus started with schools where headteachers made such a claim. The first task was to test the validity of these claims, drawing on evidence in the particular schools selected for study. The second task was to seek explanations for how such improvement occurred and then to match it against the linkages or pathways that are shown in the model in Figure 3.1.

The studies differed in one important respect. Hillier's was conducted in two stages, with one round of data collected in 1996, soon after each element of the reform was in place and the pool of indicators was in the early stages of implementation. The second stage occurred in 1998, when Hillier returned to the three schools to assess progress since 1996.

Wee's study in four schools was conducted in late 1997, when the pool of indicators was well developed and a substantial body of evidence was available to test claims of improved learning outcomes. Findings revealed that schools could cite evidence that their efforts had led to improved outcomes for students. They drew on many sources of data in recognising improved student learning in

their schools. This illustrated the capacity being developed in the system to gather information about the performance of schools.

Maps of direct and indirect links were prepared by Wee for each school using the rigorous approach to data collection, data display and data reduction for qualitative research proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). These maps show how school capacity associated with being a School of the Future had led to improved outcomes for students. Actions at the school level that had a direct impact on student learning are in the domains of professional development, implementation of the curriculum and standards framework, and monitoring. The impact of resource allocation is indirect, mediated through curriculum, professional development, monitoring and staffing.

Self-managing schools in developing nations

The worldwide trend to self-management is further illustrated by initiatives in developing nations, supported by international aid agencies, including the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF. UNESCO hosted a forum in Paris in February 2001 that provided an opportunity for the sharing of experiences in recent years.

It is likely that some of the best evidence of the impact of self-management on learning outcomes may come from these settings. An explanation lies in the manner in which self-management has been linked to learning. This writer was invited to serve as international evaluator of a project in Indonesia supported by UNESCO and UNICEF under the title 'Creating Learning Communities for Children'. Four initiatives were combined in a pilot project conducted in 79 schools in three provinces (Central Java, East Java and South Sulawesi), including the introduction of a limited form of self-management, with a small budget for each school; professional development for teachers; encouragement of parents and other members of the community to support their schools; and, most important, changes to learning and teaching under the theme 'active joyful effective learning'. Improvement on key indicators such as student attendance and learning outcomes was documented for most schools.

Implications for policy-makers and practitioners

The research suggests that structural rearrangements are but a precondition if there is to be an impact on learning outcomes. Whether there is impact depends on making links across several levels to reach the classroom and the student, so that 'the changes characterised by decentralisation have washed over and around children in classrooms' (Bullock and Thomas, 1997: 219).

The implications for policy-makers and practitioners are relatively clear. These may be expressed in the form of strategic intentions, along the lines

proposed by Caldwell and Spinks (1998), who derived a set of 100 from their review of developments on the three tracks for change around the world. The following reflect the findings reported in this paper. An action statement for the system or school may preface each. For 1, this may be 'In Metropolitan Education Authority, it is recognised that the primary purpose of self-management is . . .' or 'In Local College, it is recognised that the primary purpose of self-management is . . .', with appropriate amendment in the subsequent text. Each such intention can form the basis of more detailed planning or the design and delivery of professional development programmes.

1 The primary purpose of self-management is to make a contribution to learning, so schools that aspire to success in this domain will make an unrelenting effort to utilise all of the capacities that accrue with self-management to achieve that end.
2 There will be clear, explicit and planned links, either direct or indirect, between each of the capacities that come with self-management and activities in the school that relate to learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching.
3 There is a strong association between the mix and capacities of staff and success in addressing needs and priorities in learning, so schools will develop a capacity to optimally select staff, taking account of these needs and priorities.
4 There is a strong association between the knowledge and skills of staff and learning outcomes for students, so schools will employ their capacity for self-management to design, select, implement or utilise professional development programmes to help ensure these outcomes.
5 A feature of staff selection and professional development will be the building of high-performing teams whose work is needs based and data driven, underpinned by a culture that values quality, effectiveness, equity and efficiency.
6 Schools will have a capacity for 'backward mapping' in the design and implementation of programmes for learning, starting from goals, objectives, needs and desired outcomes, and working backwards to determine courses of action that will achieve success, utilising where possible and appropriate the capacities that accrue with self-management.
7 A key task for headteachers and other school leaders is to help make effective the links between capacities for self-management and learning outcomes, and to ensure that support is available when these links break down or prove ineffective.

While there is much that is still uncertain about the nature and impact of school reform, it is evident that the means are at hand to create a system of public schools that will provide a high quality of education for all students and that

will be professionally rewarding for teachers and other professionals. The challenge is how to put the pieces together. Making effective the linkage between self-management and learning outcomes is a promising start. We are very close to a theory of learning in the self-managing school.

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